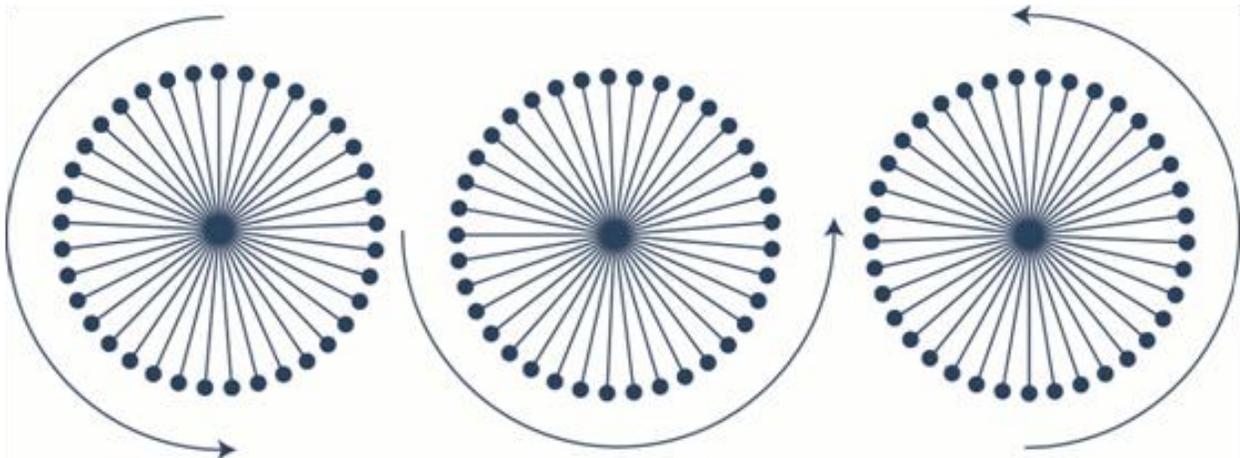


# SCHOOL THREAT ASSESSMENT TRAINING:

USING DCJS MODEL POLICIES,  
PROCEDURES,  
AND GUIDELINES

**PARTICIPANT MANUAL**







# School Threat Assessment Training: Using DCJS Model Policies, Procedures, and Guidelines

A Training Curriculum Developed by:

**Threat Assessment Resources International, LLC  
And  
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Published by:

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## INTRODUCTION

In 2013, the Virginia General Assembly enacted legislation to enhance school safety by providing for threat assessment teams to support every Virginia public school. In accordance with that new Virginia law, the Virginia Center for School and Campus Safety (VCSCS), under the Virginia Department of Criminal Justice Services (DCJS) created model policies and procedures to help local school boards establish and operate threat assessment teams to support their local schools. In 2013, VCSCS published these model policies and procedures in *Threat Assessment in Virginia Public Schools: Model Policies, Procedures, and Guidelines*, which is available through DCJS.<sup>1</sup>

This school threat assessment training curriculum was developed through DCJS to supplement the DCJS model policies, procedures and guidelines. The curriculum encompasses several learning objectives. The overall objective of this training curriculum is to help Virginia schools and districts to establish and operate school threat assessment teams effectively. Other learning objectives include facilitating discussion of the roles and responsibilities of school threat assessment teams and providing hands-on experience using the model school threat assessment procedures to investigate, assess, and manage threatening behavior in schools. Another learning objective includes familiarizing participants with the legal issues that school threat assessment teams often face, including information-sharing and confidentiality. Finally, the curriculum learning objectives include helping participants to identify what steps they need to take to implement a threat assessment capacity that fits within their individual schools and/or districts and that is effective in both preventing violence and helping persons in need.

This training curriculum includes two main sections: Training Materials and Resource Materials. The Training Materials are designed for use in the day-long course. The Resource Materials are designed as reference guides and for further reading at the conclusion of the training. The content of the training parallels the order of information presented in *Threat Assessment in Virginia Public Schools*, so training participants are also encouraged to refer to *Threat Assessment in Virginia Public Schools* for additional content on information covered.

This training curriculum was designed by Dr. Marisa Reddy Randazzo, Dr. Gene Deisinger, William Modzeleski, Jeffrey Nolan, and Tara Conway. These contributors have extensive experience investigating individual threat cases and conducting original research on targeted violence and threat assessment in educational institutions. Several of the contributors previously served as researchers on the *Safe School Initiative* and co-developers of the U.S. Secret Service and U.S. Department of Education's model for school threat assessment, which are both referenced throughout the DCJS model policies, procedures and guidelines. More

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<sup>1</sup> Virginia Department of Criminal Justice Services (2013). Threat assessment in Virginia public schools: Model policies, procedures, and guidelines. Richmond, VA: Author.

information about the curriculum contributors is available in the About the Contributors section of this curriculum. More information on the expertise and research behind the DCJS model policies, procedures and guidelines is available in *Threat Assessment in Virginia Public Schools*. Additional books and articles about school threat assessment and related topics are listed in the Further Reading section herein.

As a final note, participants are encouraged to use their training experience to broaden their network of professional contacts in the area of threat assessment. The colleagues you meet at a training session could be very helpful in handling a particular threat at a later date. Threat assessment is a field that benefits from connectivity with peers and subject matter experts. We encourage you to use your time in the training and afterward to introduce yourself and trade contact information, in the event you could be of assistance to a colleague in the future.

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## **TRAINING MATERIALS**



Training Slides



**School Threat Assessment Training:**

**Using DCJS Model Policies, Procedures, and Guidelines**

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**Session Agenda**

- Introduction and Overview
- Rationale for Threat Assessment Approach
- Developing a Threat Assessment Team
- Identifying and Reporting Threats
- How to Conduct a Threat Assessment / Assessing and Classifying Threats
- Responding to and Managing Threats
- Legal Issues and Confidentiality
- Steps for Implementing Threat Assessment in Your School
- Enhancing School Climates
- Summary and Q&A

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**Disclosure**

- The threat assessment policies and procedures contained herein are *models that are based on a synthesis of known best practices and are consistent with Virginia law. They are not intended to be prescriptive. Although required to adopt policies for the establishment of threat assessment teams, local school boards have authority to establish any policies or procedures that are consistent with applicable laws and regulations.*

*Threat Assessment in Virginia Public Schools: Model Policies, Procedures and Guidelines. VA DCJS (2013)*

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**Introduction and Overview**



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Opening Question:

***What is “threat assessment?”***



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**What is School Threat Assessment?**

A systematic process that is designed to:

- 1 • Identify students of concern
- 2 • Gather information/investigate
- 3 • Assess student and situation
- 4 • Manage the student / situation



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## School Threat Assessment

- Threat assessment involves asking: Is this student / person on a pathway toward violence?
- Using a team can be particularly effective for gathering and evaluating information, and intervening if necessary.
- Threat assessment and case management is not an adversarial process. Engagement with a person of concern can be critical to preventing violence or harm.



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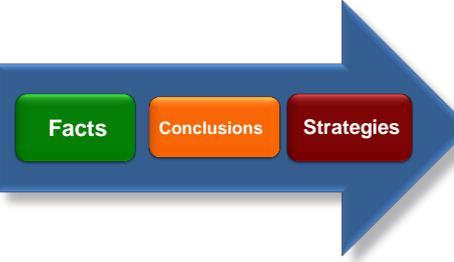
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## Threat Assessment Process

Threat assessment is fact-based and deductive:



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## Goal of Threat Assessment

The primary goal of threat assessment is the **safety** of all persons involved.

Counseling, support, confrontation, termination, arrest, prosecution, etc., are **tools** to reach that goal.



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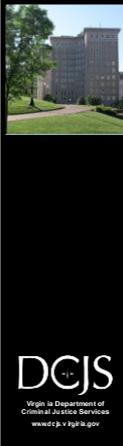
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### Why Are We Here?

- Virginia law now requires threat assessment teams for public schools, as follows:
  - Each local school board must adopt policies for the establishment of threat assessment teams.
    - Such policies must include procedures for referrals to community service boards and health providers where appropriate.

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### Why Are We Here? (cont.)

- The superintendent of each school division must establish a threat assessment team for each school.
  - Each team must include persons with expertise in:
    - Counseling
    - Instruction
    - School administration
    - Law enforcement
  - Threat assessment teams may serve more than one school (as determined by the superintendent).

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### Why Are We Here? (cont.)

- Each threat assessment team must:
  - Provide guidance to students, faculty, and staff on recognizing threatening /aberrant behavior that may represent a threat to the community, school, or self;
  - Identify members of the school community to whom threats should be reported;
  - Implement policies adopted by school board for threat assessment;
  - Immediately report to the superintendent (or designee) any preliminary determination that a student poses a threat of violence or physical harm to self or others; and,
  - Report quantitative data on its activities.

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### Goals of the Session

- Know the requirements for Virginia school boards, superintendents, and threat assessment teams.
- Understand why violence prevention is possible and how threat assessment works.
- Learn what makes for an effective threat assessment team and program.
- Develop and practice skills to conduct threat assessments and respond to and manage threatening situations.
- Know basic legal issues, confidentiality.
- Understand the importance of safe school climates and strategies to enhance school climates.



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### Rationale for Threat Assessment Approach



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### Assumptions & Principles

- There are certain assumptions that provide rationale for the school threat assessment model.
- These assumptions come from major research on school shootings and on other acts of targeted violence, as well as research on threat assessment.
- The principles that govern threat assessment are derived from decades of research and practice in assessing and managing threatening situations.



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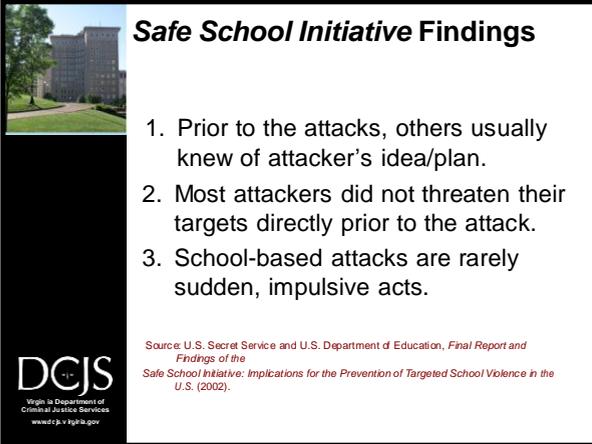
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**Safe School Initiative Findings**

1. Prior to the attacks, others usually knew of attacker's idea/plan.
2. Most attackers did not threaten their targets directly prior to the attack.
3. School-based attacks are rarely sudden, impulsive acts.

Source: U.S. Secret Service and U.S. Department of Education, *Final Report and Findings of the Safe School Initiative: Implications for the Prevention of Targeted School Violence in the U.S. (2002)*.

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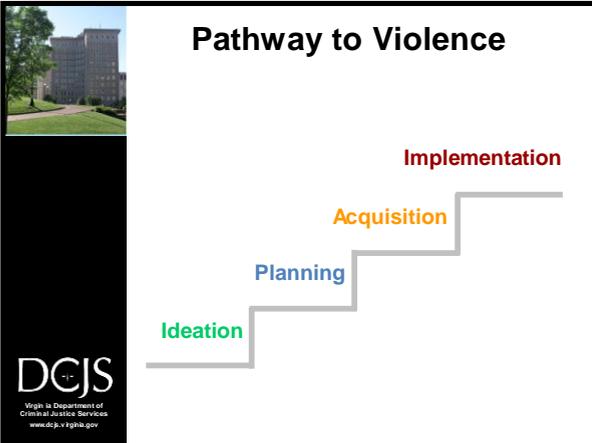
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**Pathway to Violence**

Implementation  
Acquisition  
Planning  
Ideation

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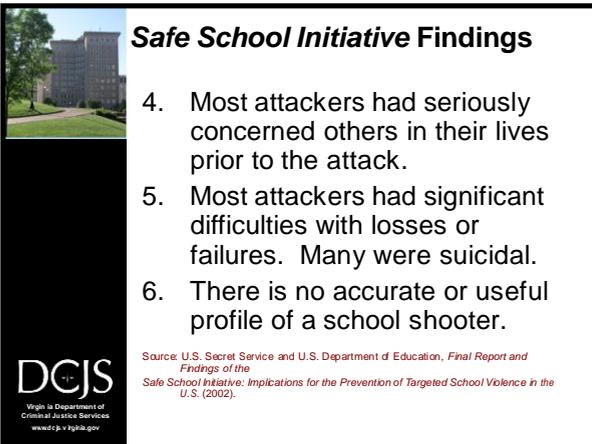
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**Safe School Initiative Findings**

4. Most attackers had seriously concerned others in their lives prior to the attack.
5. Most attackers had significant difficulties with losses or failures. Many were suicidal.
6. There is no accurate or useful profile of a school shooter.

Source: U.S. Secret Service and U.S. Department of Education, *Final Report and Findings of the Safe School Initiative: Implications for the Prevention of Targeted School Violence in the U.S. (2002)*.

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### Safe School Initiative Findings

7. Many felt bullied, persecuted, or injured by others prior to the attack.
8. Most attackers had access to weapons – and had used weapons -- prior to the attack.
9. In many cases, other students were involved in some capacity.
10. Despite prompt law enforcement response, most incidents were stopped by means other than law enforcement intervention.  
Most were very brief in duration.

Source: U.S. Secret Service and U.S. Department of Education, *Final Report and Findings of the Safe School Initiative: Implications for the Prevention of Targeted School Violence in the U.S.* (2002).



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### Implications for Prevention

- Many school attacks/crime can be prevented.
- Information about a student’s ideas and plans for violence can be observed or discovered before harm can occur.
- But information available is likely to be scattered and fragmented.
- Key is to act quickly upon an initial report of concern, gather other pieces of the puzzle, then assemble to see what picture emerges.



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### Guiding Principles of Threat Assessment

- Targeted school violence is the end result of an understandable, and oftentimes discernible, process of thinking and behavior.
- Targeted school violence stems from an interaction among the individual, the situation, the setting, and the target.
- An investigative, skeptical, inquisitive mindset is critical to successful threat assessment.



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### Guiding Principles of Threat Assessment

- Effective threat assessment is based upon facts, rather than upon characteristics or “traits.”
- An “integrated systems approach” should guide threat assessment inquiries and investigations.



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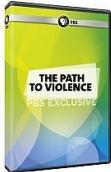
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<http://video.pbs.org/video/2336803730/>



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### Developing and Operating a Threat Assessment Team



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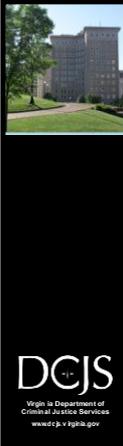
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### Developing a Threat Assessment Team

- The superintendent of each school division must establish a threat assessment team for each school.
- Threat assessment teams may serve more than one school (as determined by the superintendent).
- Each team must include persons with expertise in:
  - Counseling
  - Instruction
  - School administration
  - Law enforcement

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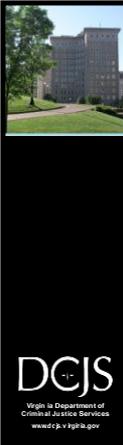
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### Operating a Threat Assessment Team

Each threat assessment team must:

- Provide guidance to students, faculty, and staff on recognizing threatening /aberrant behavior that may represent a threat to the community, school, or self;
- Identify members of the school community to whom threats should be reported;
- Implement policies adopted by school board for threat assessment;
- Immediately report to the superintendent (or designee) any preliminary determination that a student poses a threat of violence or physical harm to self or others; and,
- Report quantitative data on its activities.

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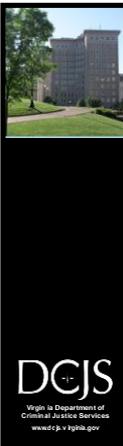
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### Optional Components

- District Oversight Team
- Basic procedures / guidelines
- Threat assessment training
- Access to legal counsel input on information-sharing
- Access to mental health and support resources (school, community)

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**Optional Components**

- Table-top exercises
- Record-keeping
- Reporting procedures/mechanisms
- General awareness training
- Communications with parents and community
- Community partnerships

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**Group Exercise**

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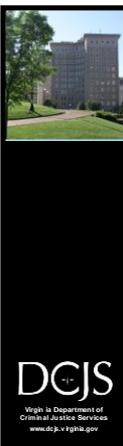
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**Identifying and Reporting Threats**

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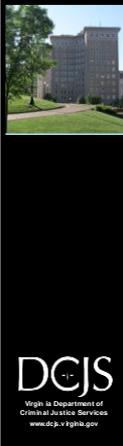
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### Importance of Reporting

- Reporting allows something to be done
- Earlier reporting allows greater range of options
- Everyone can play a critical role in prevention
- Role of threat assessment team is not punitive
- Goals are to maintain safety and connect person with necessary help

*"If you see something, say something."*

Source: NYC Metropolitan Transportation Authority

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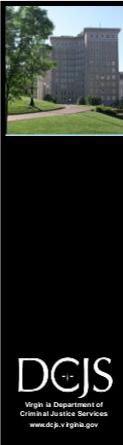
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### Who Can Report?

- Require all division personnel, volunteers and contractors to report to designated administrator:
  - Any expression of intent to harm another person, concerning communications, or concerning behaviors that suggest a student may intend to commit an act of violence
- Reports can also come from:
  - Students
  - Parents
  - Community members
  - Outside

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### How to Report?

- Team must designate person(s) to whom reports can be made.
- Can include use of anonymous reporting mechanisms
- Reporting enhanced by efforts to promote awareness about team as resource and about reporting requirements
  - Periodic
  - Audience-specific
  - Multiple platforms to enhance awareness
- Certain threats require immediate notification to law enforcement.

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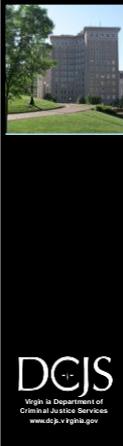
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**Group Exercise**

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**How to Conduct a Threat Assessment**

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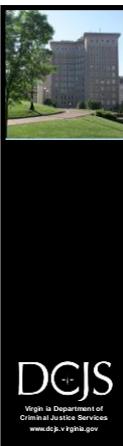
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**Steps in the Threat Assessment Process**

1. Threat assessment team receives report of threat
2. Team gathers more information and checks facts
3. Team analyzes information and assesses / classifies threat.
4. If the team sees that situation poses a threat, the team alerts superintendent and responds to threat to manage threat, reduce risk, and get assistance
5. Team and others monitor and re-evaluate plan to ensure safety
6. Team and others follow up as appropriate

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### Threat Assessment Steps

1. Threat assessment team receives a report of a threat or threatening behavior.

Initial fact-finding can follow disciplinary procedures, with school administrator conducting initial interviews:

- Student who made the threat
- Witness(es)
- Recipient(s) of threat
- Adults in school who know student best
- Records review



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### Threat Assessment Steps

2. Team gathers more information about the student of concern.

*Think about those who might have information:*

- Coaches, other instructors
- Staff
- Friends / Classmates
- Employer
- Parents
- Local law enforcement
- Community services
- Online information / search



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### Threat Assessment Steps

3. Team analyzes information gathered by answering 11 analytical questions



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### Eleven Key Questions

1. *What are the student's motive(s) and goals? What first brought him/her to someone's attention?*
2. *Have there been any communications suggesting ideas or intent to attack?*
3. *Has the student shown any inappropriate interest in school attacks/attackers, weapons, incidents of mass violence?*

Source: U.S. Secret Service and U.S. Department of Education, *Guide to Managing Threatening Situations and Creating Safe School Climates* (2002).



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### Eleven Key Questions

4. *Has the student engaged in attack-related behaviors?*
5. *Does the student have the capacity to carry out an act of targeted violence?*
6. *Is the student experiencing hopelessness, desperation, and/or despair?*

Source: U.S. Secret Service and U.S. Department of Education, *Guide to Managing Threatening Situations and Creating Safe School Climates* (2002).



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### Eleven Key Questions

7. *Does the student have a trusting relationship with at least one responsible adult?*
8. *Does the student see violence as an acceptable, desirable – or the only – way to solve a problem?*
9. *Are the student's conversation and "story" consistent with his or her actions?*

Source: U.S. Secret Service and U.S. Department of Education, *Guide to Managing Threatening Situations and Creating Safe School Climates* (2002).



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### Eleven Key Questions

10. Are other people concerned about the student's potential for violence?

11. What circumstances might affect the likelihood of an attack?

Source: U.S. Secret Service and U.S. Department of Education, *Guide to Managing Threatening Situations and Creating Safe School Climates* (2002).



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### Assessing the Threat

4. Make the Assessment / Evaluation

- Assessment question:
  - Does the person pose a threat of targeted violence at school?**
  - Is the person's behavior consistent with movement on a pathway toward violence?
  - Do the person's current situation and setting incline him or her toward or away from targeted violence?

If the team believes that the person poses a threat, the team will then develop and implement a plan to respond to the threat to manage and reduce the risk.



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### Tips for Discussing Assessment

- Focus on facts of specific case.
- Focus on the student's behavior rather than the person's traits.
- Focus on understanding the context of behavior.
- Examine progression of behavior over time.
- Corroborate critical information.



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### Classifying the Threat

- **Low Risk Threat:** Person/situation does not appear to pose a threat of violence and any underlying issues can be resolved easily.
- **Moderate Risk Threat:** Person/situation does not appear to pose a threat of violence at this time but exhibits behaviors that indicate a continuing intent to harm and potential for future violence.
- **High Risk Threat:** Person/situation appears to pose a threat of violence, exhibiting behaviors that indicate both a continuing intent to harm and efforts to acquire the capacity to carry out the plan.
- **Imminent Threat:** Person/situation appears to pose a clear and immediate threat of serious violence toward others that requires containment and action to protect identified target(s).



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### Group Exercise



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### Responding to and Managing Threats



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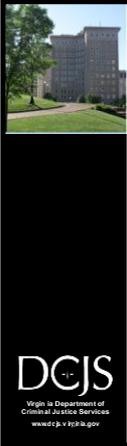
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### Responding to Threats

- Successful management of a threatening situation can require substantial time and effort.
- Management of these situations comprise three related functions:
  - Controlling / containing the situation and/or student in a way that will prevent the possibility of an attack;
  - Protecting and aiding possible targets to the extent possible; and,
  - Providing support and guidance to help the student deal successfully with his or her problems.

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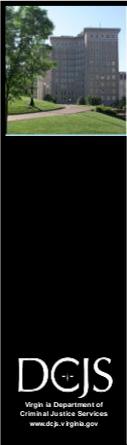
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### Case Management Resources

- Disciplinary measures
- Outpatient counseling/mental health care
- Emergency psychiatric evaluation
- Mentoring relationship
- Academic accommodations
- Suspension/expulsion
- Alternative schooling/home schooling
- Involvement in extra-curricular activities
- Social skills training
- Behavioral contract
- Parental involvement
- Law enforcement involvement
- Diversion programs
- Management by walking around/alliance
- Others?

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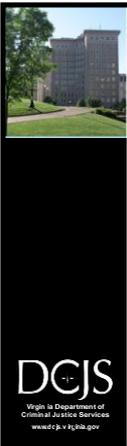
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### Responding by Threat Level

#### Low Risk Threat:

- Disciplinary action based on school board policy.
- Parents of subject student notified.
- Should include apology, retraction, or explanation that indicates threat is over.
- Parents of recipient(s) may be notified; if so, promptly and reassured threat is resolved.
- Referral to services not necessary – but if used, assign a case manager to monitor.
- If new information comes to light, team should review and re-assess.

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### Responding by Threat Level

**Moderate Risk Threat:**

- Notify intended victim(s) and their parents.
- Take precautions to protect intended victim(s).
- Take steps to monitor and supervise the subject student.
- Disciplinary action according to disciplinary policy.
- Notify subject student's parent(s).
- Consult with school resource officer to help with supervision, advise on need for law enforcement action.
- Where appropriate, refer for counseling and/or other support services.
- May require a mental health evaluation (see High Risk). Written safety plan if evaluation warrants.



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### Responding by Threat Level

**High Risk Threat:**

- Notify law enforcement to contain threat and consult with School Safety and Security.
- Take immediate precautions to protect potential victim(s).
- Directly supervise subject student.
- Notify parents of intended victim(s) before subject student leaves school grounds.
- Notify parents of subject student and enlist their support in preventing subject student from harming.
- Notify superintendent or designee.
- Mental health evaluation must be conducted on subject student by qualified team member or other.
- Administrator / discipline officer determines conditions for re-admission.
- Team develops written safety plan based on mental health evaluation and team's information.



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### Responding by Threat Level

**Imminent Threat:**

***Immediately contain threat and take action to protect identified target(s).***

- Immediately notify law enforcement to contain threat and consult with School Safety and Security.
- Take immediate precautions to protect potential victim(s).
- Directly supervise subject student.
- Notify parents of intended victim(s) before subject student leaves school grounds.
- Notify parents of subject student and enlist their support in preventing subject student from harming.
- Notify superintendent or designee.
- Mental health evaluation must be conducted on subject student by qualified team member or other.
- Team develops written safety plan based on mental health evaluation and team's information (referral for services, case manager, conditions for re-admission, scheduled follow-up with student and parents, re-assessment).



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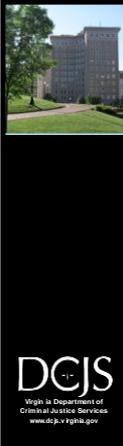
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**Group Exercise**

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**Legal Issues and Confidentiality**

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**Information Sharing: FERPA**

- Teams should consult with legal counsel early on, as well as on specific cases as needed.
- FERPA should not be an impediment to effective threat assessment and case management.
- FERPA governs records only, not observations, communications, etc.
- FERPA does not govern police records (for police/investigative purpose).
- New guidance from ED encourages information sharing where public safety is a concern (document rationale).
- FERPA does not permit a private right of action.

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### Information Sharing: HIPAA

- Confidentiality is held by patient, not mental health provider.
- In cases where HIPAA/state law applies, can try these strategies:
  - No legal prohibition against providing information to health/MH professionals.
  - Can inquire about *Tarasoff* - type duty.
  - Can ask student/parent for permission to disclose.



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### Reporting & Record Keeping

- Teams must report to superintendent or designee any case where student poses a threat
- Teams must report quantitative data on threat assessment cases.
- Teams should document assessments, safety plans, monitoring progress and re-assessments.
- Document exact words and actions - include date, time, behaviors, witnesses
- Document protective actions taken or offered
- Consult with legal counsel about documentation
- Can use Student Threat Assessment and Response Report form as model



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### Steps for Implementing Threat Assessment in Your School



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**Steps for Implementing Threat Assessment**

- School Board adopts policy to establish threat assessment teams
  - Policy should include referral procedures
  - Can use DCJS model policy as guideline
- District Superintendent establishes a threat assessment team for each school
  - Teams can serve more than one school
- Each threat assessment team must include persons from:
  - School administration
  - Instruction
  - Counseling
  - Law enforcement
- District Superintendent may also choose to establish an Oversight Team

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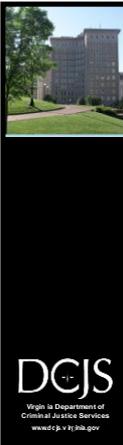
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**Steps for Implementing Threat Assessment**

- Each threat assessment team must adopt threat assessment procedures as established in school board policy.
- Each threat assessment team must identify person(s) to whom threats should be reported.
- Each threat assessment team must provide guidance on recognizing and reporting threatening /aberrant behavior.
- All school division employees, volunteers, and contractors must report threats /threatening behavior immediately to designated person(s).
- Establish ways for threat assessment team to record and report required quantitative data.

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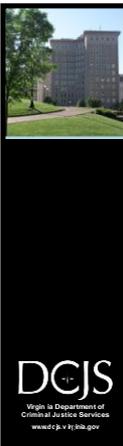
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**Optional Additional Steps**

- Members of each threat assessment team should be trained in threat assessment procedures.
- Each threat assessment team can seek to establish liaison relationships with community resources.
- Each threat assessment team can help promote awareness about team within school, community.
- Oversight Teams can facilitate access of threat assessment teams to training, community resources, expert consultation, standardized procedures, other resources.

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**Enhancing School Climates**



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**Enhancing School Climate**

- Assess and enhance school climate:
  - Surveys for faculty, staff, students, parents, others
  - Data-driven enhancements
  - Student input for solutions and implementation
- Connection with all students:
  - Powerful protective factor
  - Low-cost or no-cost options



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**Summary and Q&A**



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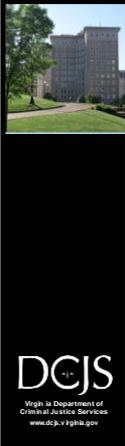
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### Summary

- Virginia law requires threat assessment teams, policy, reporting.
- Threat assessment is considered best practice for school violence prevention.
- VCSCS model policies, procedures, guidelines offer resource consistent with Virginia law and current best practice.
- Alternatives can be used – make sure consistent with all aspects of Virginia law
- Consult with VCSCS, colleagues, threat assessment experts on situations of concern.

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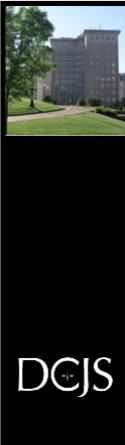
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**QUESTIONS?**

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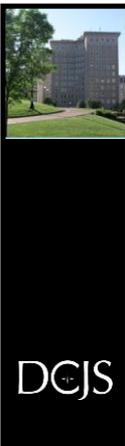
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### Contact Information

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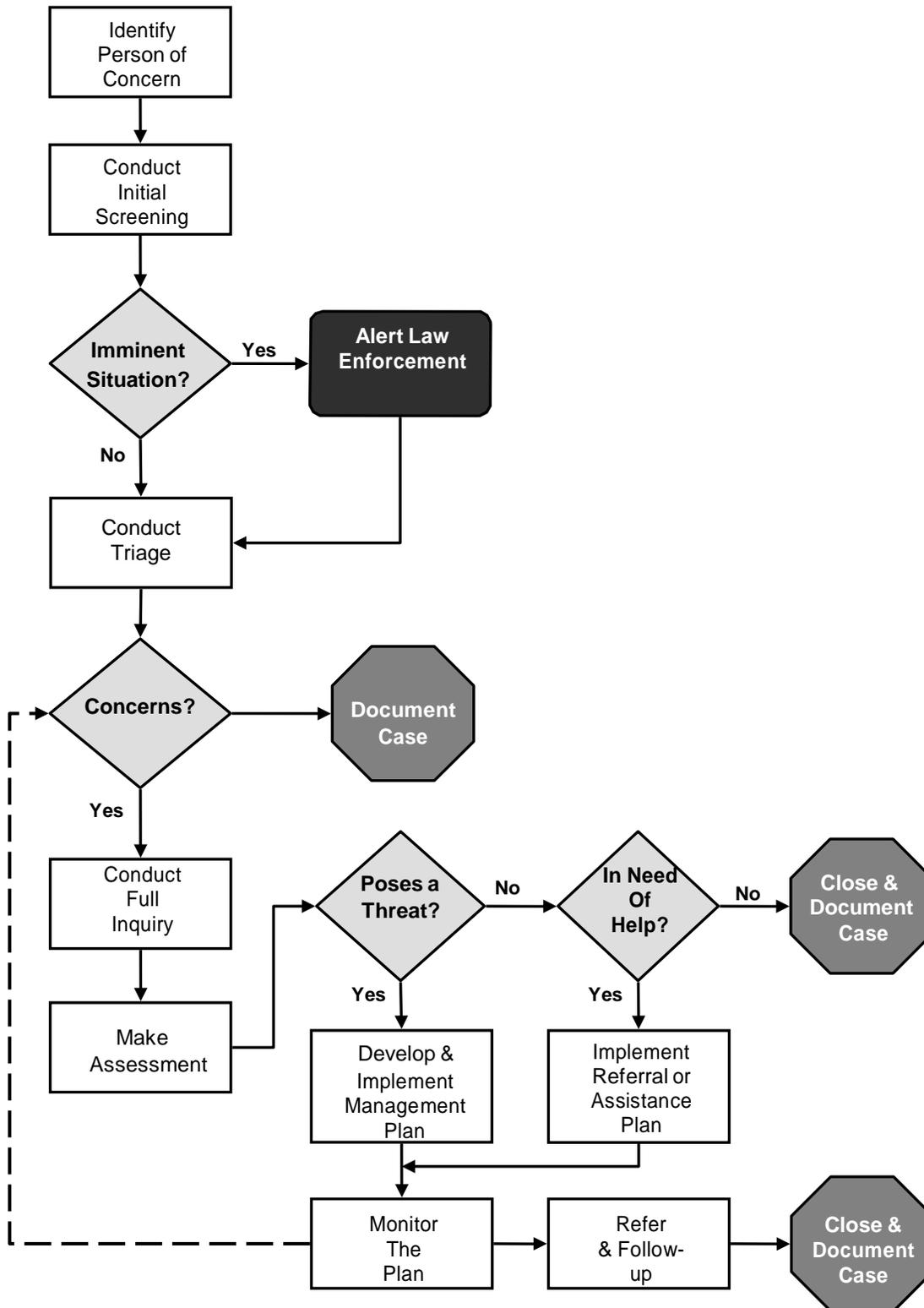
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## **RESOURCE MATERIALS**



### Threat Assessment & Management Process - Flowchart



Source: Deisinger, G. & Randazzo, M. R. (2008)



## Principles of School Threat Assessment and Management

The following principles guide school threat assessment and management. These principles were first articulated in *Threat Assessment in Schools: A Guide to Managing Threatening Situations and Creating Safe School Climates (2002)*<sup>2</sup> and further explained in *Threat Assessment in Virginia Public Schools: Model Policies, Procedures, and Guidelines (2013)*<sup>3</sup>. These principles are intended to underlie the overall work of a threat assessment team, whether operating within an individual school or at the district level.

### **Principle 1: Does the Person Pose a Threat?**

The central question of a threat assessment is whether the person in question *poses* a threat, NOT whether they *made* a threat. A threat assessment team should take *all* potential threatening behaviors seriously, not just those that have been verbalized or expressed in some other way. Similarly, just because a person has expressed intent to do harm does not necessarily mean that he/she poses a legitimate threat.

### **Principle 2: Targeted Violence Can Often Be Prevented**

Targeted violence in schools is typically the end result of a logical and potentially detectable progression of behavior. Attackers typically come up with an idea to do harm, develop a plan, acquire the means to do harm (e.g. get access to weapons), and then carry out the attack. A threat assessment team can look for information that may indicate that a person is on such a trajectory toward violence, and if so, the team then determines where it might be able to intervene to prevent harm.

### **Principle 3: Targeted Violence is a Function of Several Factors**

Threat assessment should examine facts about the individual, the context of behavior, the environment in which the individual lives, the individual's current situation, factors that may precipitate violence or other negative behavior, and ways to make a target less accessible or vulnerable.

### **Principle 4: Corroboration is Critical**

Being skeptical about information received and corroborating information through multiple sources are critical to successful threat assessment and management. This means that it is important to check facts where possible.

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<sup>2</sup> Fein, Vosseskuil, Pollack, Borum, Modzeleski, & Reddy (2002). Threat assessment in schools: A guide to managing threatening situations and creating safe school climates. Washington, DC: U.S. Secret Service and U.S. Department of Education. Available online at [http://www.secretservice.gov/ntac/ssi\\_guide.pdf](http://www.secretservice.gov/ntac/ssi_guide.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> Virginia Department of Criminal Justice Services (2013). Threat assessment in Virginia public schools: Model policies, procedures, and guidelines. Richmond, VA: Author. Available online at <http://www.dcjs.virginia.gov/vcscs/documents/ThreatAssessmentPoliciesProceduresGuidelines-Final.pdf>

**Principle 5: Threat Assessment is about Behavior, not Profiles**

There is no single “type” of person who perpetrates targeted violence in schools. Instead, threat assessment is evidence-based, focusing on the specific behaviors a person has exhibited and determining whether the person poses a threat (or is at risk) based upon those behaviors.

**Principle 6: Cooperating Systems are Critical Resources**

Communication, collaboration, and coordination among various departments and agencies are critical throughout the process of threat assessment and management. Using different systems throughout campus as well as outside resources provides more eyes and ears on the process of both assessing and managing a potentially violent situation.

Above all, safety should be the primary goal of all threat assessment and management efforts. The threat assessment team’s ultimate purpose is to ensure the safety of the school community by identifying, assessing, and managing threats. Any particular interventions — counseling, support, suspension, confrontation, termination, arrest, hospitalization, etc. — are tools to achieve the goals of safety. They are not ends unto themselves.

## Analysis and Evaluation Questions for School Threat Assessments

### **Analyze the Information Gathered**

After a threat assessment team has gathered and documented for a school threat assessment, we recommend that the team use this information to answer several key analysis questions. These questions for school threat assessment were first articulated in *Threat Assessment in Schools: A Guide to Managing Threatening Situations and Creating Safe School Climates (2002)*<sup>4</sup> and further cited in *Threat Assessment in Virginia Public Schools: Model Policies, Procedures, and Guidelines (2013)*<sup>5</sup>. These questions are designed to help organize the information gathered, as well as demonstrate where information may be missing.

### ***What are the person's motive(s) and goals?***

The purpose of this question is to understand the overall context of the behavior that first brought the person to the attention of the threat assessment team, and also to understand whether those conditions or situation still exist. If those conditions still exist, the team can use that information in crafting a management or referral/monitoring plan if necessary.

### ***Have there been any communications suggesting ideas or intent to attack?***

If the team finds that the person in question has communicated an idea or plan to do harm — and that the source of that information is credible — this is a strong indication that the person may be on a pathway toward violence and therefore poses a threat. The team should try to confirm or corroborate this information through another source, or through other information.

### ***Has the person shown inappropriate interest in any of the following?***

- School, campus, or other rampage attacks or attackers;
- Weapons (including recent acquisition of any relevant weapon);
- Incidents of mass violence (terrorism, workplace violence, mass murderers);
- Obsessive pursuit, stalking or monitoring others.

A “yes” to this question alone does not necessarily indicate that the person in question poses a threat or is otherwise in need of some assistance. Many people are interested in these topics but never pose any threat. However, if a person shows some fascination or fixation on any of these topics and has raised concern in another way, such as by expressing an idea to do harm to others or to himself/herself, recently purchasing a weapon, or showing helplessness or despair, the combination of these facts should increase the team’s concern about the person in question.

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<sup>4</sup> Fein, Vosseskuil, Pollack, Borum, Modzeleski, & Reddy (2002). Threat assessment in schools: A guide to managing threatening situations and creating safe school climates. Washington, DC: U.S. Secret Service and U.S. Department of Education. Available online at [http://www.secretservice.gov/ntac/ssi\\_guide.pdf](http://www.secretservice.gov/ntac/ssi_guide.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> Virginia Department of Criminal Justice Services (2013). Threat assessment in Virginia public schools: Model policies, procedures, and guidelines. Richmond, VA: Author. Available online at <http://www.dcjs.virginia.gov/vcscs/documents/ThreatAssessmentPoliciesProceduresGuidelines-Final.pdf>

***Has the person engaged in attack-related behaviors (i.e., any behavior that moves an idea of harm forward toward actual harm)?***

If the team determines that the person has engaged in any attack-related behavior, this is an indication that the person is on a pathway toward violence and has taken a step(s) forward toward carrying out an idea to do harm. Any of these behaviors should prompt the team to try to corroborate or confirm these behaviors through other sources (or confirm the reliability of the source reporting these behaviors). Any attack-related behaviors should be seen as a serious indication of potential violence.

***Does the person have the capacity to carry out an act of targeted violence?***

It is important for the team to recognize that in some regions, it is quite common to own weapons and to have experience using weapons from a young age. Therefore, what the team should focus on is the combination of the person owning or having access to weapons AND some indication that the person has an idea or plan to do harm. Similarly, the team should be concerned if the person develops an idea to do harm and THEN starts showing an interest in weapons. Either combination should raise the team's concern, and move the team toward determining that the person poses a threat.

***Is the person experiencing hopelessness, desperation and/or despair?***

If the team determines that the person in question is experiencing — or has recently experienced — desperation, hopelessness, and/or thoughts of suicide and there is NO other information indicating the person has thoughts or plans to harm other people, the team should develop a plan to refer the person to necessary mental health care or emergency psychiatric intervention, possibly involving the institution's counseling center and/or police or local law enforcement if necessary. If the team determines that the person in question is experiencing — or has recently experienced — desperation, hopelessness, and/or thoughts of suicide and there IS information that the person also has thoughts or plans to harm other people, the team should determine that the person poses a threat and move to develop and implement a management plan to intervene with the person. The management plan should include resources to evaluate and treat the person's desperation and/or suicidal thoughts/plans.

***Does the person have a trusting relationship with at least one responsible person (e.g., a parent, teacher, coach, advisor, etc.)?***

If the team decides that the person in question poses a threat of harm, the team can solicit the help of this responsible person. The responsible person can also be encouraged to take a more active role in discouraging the person from engaging in any harm — whether to himself/herself, others, or both.

***Does the person see violence as an acceptable, desirable, or only way to solve problems?***

A "yes" to this question should increase the team's concern about the person in question. But it should also lead the team to consider what options they may have for helping the person solve their problems or improve their situation so that the person no longer looks toward violence to solve the problem.

***Is the person's conversation and "story" consistent with his or her actions?***

If the team decides to interview the person of concern, the interview can be used as an opportunity to determine how forthcoming or truthful the person is being with the team. The less forthcoming the person is, the more work the team may have to do to develop an alliance if a management plan is needed.

***Are other people concerned about the person's potential for violence?***

As people are often reluctant to see violence as a possibility, if the team learns that someone in the person's life does think the person is capable of violence, this should raise the team's concern considerably. However, the team should recognize that those in close relationships with the person may be too close to the person/situation to admit violence is possible or even likely.

***What circumstances might affect the likelihood of violence?***

All of us are capable of violence under the right (or wrong) circumstances. By asking this question, the team can identify what factors in the person's life might change in the near- to mid-term, and whether those changes could make things better or worse for the person in question. If things look like they might improve for the person, the team could monitor the person and situation for a while and re-assess after some time has passed. If things look like they might deteriorate, the team can develop a management plan (if they believe the person poses a threat of harm or self-harm) or a referral plan (if the person does not pose a threat but appears in need of help) to help counteract the downturn in the person's circumstances.

**Make the Assessment**

Once the team has answered the above questions (recognizing that a team may not be able to obtain information regarding all of the questions) and documented its answers, it then assesses the threat posed by the individual by answering the following two ultimate assessment questions:

***A. Does the person pose a threat of harm, whether to him/herself, to others, or both? That is, does the person's behavior suggest that he or she is on a pathway toward harm?***

If the answer is "no," the team documents its response and reasoning and proceeds to Question B. If the answer is "yes," the team documents its response and rationale, and then proceeds to develop, implement, and continually monitor an individualized threat management plan to reduce the risk that the person poses. The team should document the details of this plan, as well as document steps it takes to implement the plan and/or refer the person for help. The team does not need to answer Question B.

***B. If the person does not pose a threat of harm, does the person otherwise show a need for help or intervention, such as mental health care?***

If the answer is "no," the team documents its response, records the person and incident in the team's incident database, and closes the inquiry. If the answer is "yes," the team documents its response and rationale, and then develops, implements, and re-evaluates a plan to monitor the person and situation and/or connect the person with resources in order to assist him/her with solving problems or addressing needs. The team should document the details of this plan, as well as document steps taken to implement the plan and/or refer the person for help.



## Implementation Checklist

### Steps for Implementing Threat Assessment in Virginia Public Schools:

- School Board adopts policy to establish threat assessment teams
  - Policy should include referral procedures
  - Can use DCJS model policy as guideline
  
- District Superintendent establishes a threat assessment team for each school
  - Teams can serve more than one school
  
- Each threat assessment team must include persons from:
  - School administration
  - Instruction
  - Counseling
  - Law enforcement
  
- District Superintendent may also choose to establish an Oversight Team
  
- Each threat assessment team must adopt threat assessment procedures as established in school board policy
  
- Each threat assessment team must identify person(s) to whom threats should be reported.
  - Each threat assessment team must provide guidance on recognizing and reporting threatening /aberrant behavior.
  
- All school division employees, volunteers, and contractors must report threats /threatening behavior immediately to designated person(s).
  - Establish ways for threat assessment team to record and report required quantitative data.

**Optional Additional Steps for Implementation:**

- Members of each threat assessment team should be trained in threat assessment procedures.
  
- Each threat assessment team can seek to establish liaison relationships with community resources.
  
- Each threat assessment team can help promote awareness about team within school, community.
  
- Oversight teams can facilitate access of threat assessment teams to training, community resources, expert consultation, standardized procedures, and additional resources.

## Further Reading

### **Select Books and Articles on School Threat Assessment and Related Topics**

Cornell, D. & Sheras, P. (2006). *Guidelines for responding to student threats of violence*. Longmont, CO: Sopris West.

Available online at <http://www.amazon.com/Guidelines-Responding-Student-Threats-Violence/dp/1593185022>

Fein, R., Vossekuil, B., B., Pollack, W., Borum, R., Modzeleski, W., & Reddy, M. (2002) *Threat Assessment in schools: A guide to managing threatening situation and to creating safe school climates*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education and U.S. Secret Service.

Available online at [http://www.secretservice.gov/ntac/ssi\\_guide.pdf](http://www.secretservice.gov/ntac/ssi_guide.pdf)

Mohandie, K. (2000). *School violence threat management: A practical guide for educators, law enforcement, and mental health professionals*. San Diego, CA: Specialized Training Services.

Available online at <http://www.amazon.com/School-Violence-Threat-Management-Mohandie/dp/097031891X>

Planty, M., Truman, J. (2013) *Firearm Violence 1993-2011*. Washington, D.C. U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Bureau of Justice Statistics.

Available online at <http://www.bjs.gov/content/pub/pdf/fv9311.pdf>

Pollack, W., Modzeleski, W., Rooney., G. (2008) *Prior knowledge of potential school-based violence: Information students learn may prevent a targeted attack*. Washington, DC: U.S. Secret Service and U.S. Department of Education.

Available online at [http://www.secretservice.gov/ntac/bystander\\_study.pdf](http://www.secretservice.gov/ntac/bystander_study.pdf)

United States Department of Education (October 2007). *Balancing student privacy rights and school safety: A guide to the Family Education Rights and Privacy Act for colleges and universities*. Washington, DC: Author.

Available online at <http://www2.ed.gov/policy/gen/guid/fpco/brochures/postsec.html>

Van Dreal, J. (Ed.) (2011). *Assessing student threats: A handbook for implementing the Salem-Keizer System*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Education.

Available online at <http://www.studentthreatassessment.org/>

Vossekuil, B., Fein, R., Reddy, M., Borum, R., & Modzeleski, W. (2002). The final report and findings of the Safe School Initiatives: Implications for the prevention of school attacks in the United States.

Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education and the U.S. Secret Service.

Available online at [http://www.secretservice.gov/ntac/ssi\\_final\\_report.pdf](http://www.secretservice.gov/ntac/ssi_final_report.pdf)



## Sources for Statistics on School Violence, Crime, and Safety

### Select Sources for Statistics on School Violence, Crime, and Safety

#### **CDC School Associated Violent Death Study**

*CDC reports that track school-associated violent deaths annually, from 1992*

Available online at <http://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/youthviolence/schoolviolence/savd.html>

#### **Gun-Free Schools Act Reports**

*Reports that are issued annually by the U.S. Department of Education, providing information related to expulsions on students who bring firearms to school*

Available online at <http://www2.ed.gov/about/reports/annual/gfsa/index.html>

#### **Indicators of School Crime and Safety**

*Annual report from U.S. Department of Justice and U.S. Department of Education that provides data on crime and violence in schools from a variety of sources*

2013 Report available online at

<http://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/youthviolence/schoolviolence/savd.html>

#### **School Crime Supplement**

*A supplement to the National Crime Victimization Survey that collects information on a national level related to incidents of criminal victimization of students aged 12-18*

Available online at <http://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/getpubcats.asp?sid=108>

#### **Virginia Discipline, Crime & Violence Annual Reports**

*Annual reports on school discipline, crime, violence, and other school climate issues in Virginia.*

Available online at [http://www.doe.virginia.gov/statistics\\_reports/school\\_climate/index.shtml](http://www.doe.virginia.gov/statistics_reports/school_climate/index.shtml)

#### **Virginia School Safety Survey Reports**

*Annual reports on Virginia school safety audits, prepared by the Virginia Center for School and Campus Safety, Virginia Department of Criminal Justice Services*

<http://www.dcjs.virginia.gov/common/links.cfm?code=17&program=VCSS>

#### **Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System (YRBSS)**

*Provides survey data on a variety of issues including fighting in school and gun possession in and out of schools*

Available online at [http://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/yrbs/pdf/us\\_overviews\\_yrbs.pdf](http://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/yrbs/pdf/us_overviews_yrbs.pdf)



## ABOUT THE CONTRIBUTORS

Below are bios of the team members who developed this training curriculum. All are nationally-recognized subject matter experts within the field of behavioral threat assessment, school safety, and school violence prevention.

### **Marisa Reddy Randazzo, Ph.D**

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Dr. Marisa Randazzo is a national expert on threat assessment and targeted violence. Formerly the Chief Research Psychologist for the U.S. Secret Service, Dr. Randazzo has provided threat assessment training to thousands of professionals in higher education, secondary schools, corporations, law enforcement agencies, human resources, mental health, and the intelligence community in the United States, Canada, and the European Union. In her ten years with the Secret Service, she reviewed hundreds of threat investigations and supervised the agency's research on assassinations, presidential threats, insider threats, school shootings, security breaches, and stalking incidents. She also served as Co-Director of the Safe School Initiative, the largest federal study of school shootings in the United States, and is co-author of the U.S. Secret Service/U.S. Department of Education model of threat assessment for educational institutions. Dr. Randazzo is co-author of *Threat Assessment in Schools: A Guide to Managing Threatening Situations and Creating Safe School Climates* (2002), *The Handbook for Campus Threat Assessment and Management Teams* (2008), and *Implementing Behavioral Threat Assessment on Campus: A Virginia Tech Demonstration Project* (2009). Her research is used in the federal, state, and local law enforcement communities and has been credited in the media with preventing planned attacks. Dr. Randazzo has testified before Congress, briefed White House staff and Cabinet Secretaries and has been interviewed by major television, radio, and print news outlets, including *60 Minutes*, *Good Morning America*, *Nightline*, the *Today Show*, the *Early Show*, *48 Hours*, *Dateline NBC*, MSNBC, the *New York Times*, and *National Public Radio*. She has published numerous articles on threat assessment and violence prevention and has served on the editorial board of the *Journal of Threat Assessment*. She has also published under her maiden name, Marisa Reddy. Dr. Randazzo received her Ph.D. and Master's degree from Princeton University in Social Psychology, and a B.A. in Psychology and Religion from Williams College. Dr. Randazzo was awarded the Williams College Bicentennial Medal for her work in preventing violence. She is listed in several *Who's Who* publications for her threat assessment research and training contributions. In 2013, she was named as an expert to the American Psychological Association's Expert Panel on Preventing Gun Violence.

### **Gene Deisinger, Ph.D.**

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Dr. Gene Deisinger is a nationally recognized expert on threat assessment and management. He currently serves as Deputy Chief of Police and Director of Threat Management Services for Virginia Tech. Dr. Deisinger earned his doctorate in counseling psychology from Iowa State University. He brings a unique perspective as a licensed psychologist, a certified health service provider in psychology, and a certified law enforcement officer. Dr. Deisinger was a founding member of the Iowa State University Critical Incident Response Team. This multi-disciplinary team served as a pro-active planning group and coordinated institutional responses during crisis situations, including situations involving threats of

violence. Dr. Deisinger developed the threat management program and served as the primary threat manager for Iowa State University from the team's inception in 1994, until accepting his current position at Virginia Tech in August, 2009. He has personally managed and supervised threat cases and protective details for a broad range of governmental dignitaries, public figures, and members of the university community. For over 18 years, Dr. Deisinger has provided consultation and training to schools, colleges and universities, governmental agencies, and corporations, assisting them in developing, implementing, and refining their threat management services. He has provided consultation on a broad range of cases, helping organizations to implement integrated case management strategies. He has also been an invited presenter for numerous national and international professional organizations. In 2008, Dr. Deisinger (along with principal co-author Dr. Marisa Randazzo) published *The Handbook for Campus Threat Assessment & Management Teams*, a practical resource designed specifically for institutions of higher education. The *Handbook* has been recognized as exemplifying best practices for implementing and operating campus threat assessment and management teams. Dr. Deisinger currently serves as a subject matter expert and trainer for the Campus Threat Assessment Training initiative for institutions of higher education, a program offered through the US Department of Justice, Office of Community Oriented Policing Services. In 2009, Dr. Deisinger was appointed as a Fellow of the US Department of Education's Higher Education Center for Alcohol, Drug Abuse and Violence Prevention. In 2008, Dr. Deisinger was appointed as a subject matter expert for a joint project by the US Department of Education, US Secret Service and Federal Bureau of Investigation. That project resulted in a monograph (published in April, 2010) entitled *Campus Attacks: Targeted Violence Affecting Institutions of Higher Education*. Dr. Deisinger has provided operational support and training for several local, state, and federal law enforcement agencies. From 2002-2009, he served as a Special Deputy United States Marshal with the Joint Terrorism Task Force of the US Federal Bureau of Investigation. In 2009, in response to the tragedy at Fort Hood, Dr. Deisinger was requested to assist the Department of the Army in enhancing force protection and threat management capabilities.

### **William "Bill" Modzeleski**

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Mr. Bill Modzeleski is a nationally recognized leader in the area of school safety and emergency management. Mr. Modzeleski is a former Associate Assistant Deputy Secretary of the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Safe and Drug Free Schools. During his tenure at the Department of Education Mr. Modzeleski was instrumental in the development and implementation of several programs related to emergency management and violence prevention. These programs included: Safe Schools/Healthy Students Program (a multi-agency effort designed to approach violence prevention from a comprehensive perspective); School Emergency Response to Violence (a program designed to bring assistance to schools immediately after a crisis that has affected teaching and learning); and the REMS program (a program designed to assist schools improve their emergency management plans). Mr. Modzeleski also played leadership role in numerous studies related to school shootings, radicalization and violent extremism. Mr. Modzeleski served as co-author with staff from U.S. Secret Service on the Safe School Initiative, and co-author with staff from Secret Service and FBI on study on Targeted Attacks at Institutions of Higher Education. Mr. Modzeleski assisted the Homeland Security Studies and Analysis Institute in the design of studies related to terrorist incidents involving education targets, emergency management planning in international schools, recruitment and radicalization by

international terrorist groups, and a review of school-aged youth involved in terrorist activities. Mr. Modzeleski was also led ED's efforts to assist schools after events disrupted teaching. These events ranged from Columbine to Virginia Tech, and from Hurricanes Rita and Katrina to the tornado in Joplin MO. Mr. Modzeleski also led team that worked closely with staff from the Centers for Disease Prevention and Control (CDC) on efforts to stem the spread of the H1N1 epidemic. Mr. Modzeleski is a Distinguished Visiting Fellow at the Homeland Security Studies and Analysis Institute. Prior to his federal service he served in the U.S. Army serving in the U.S. and Vietnam. He holds a BA from the University of Bridgeport (where he recently was named a distinguished alum), and a MA from C.W. Post College.

**Jeffrey J. Nolan, J.D.**

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Mr. Jeff Nolan is a practicing attorney, and Chair of the Higher Education Practice Group at Dinse, Knapp & McAndrew, P.C. Mr. Nolan's practice focuses on representing and advising schools, institutions of higher education, and other employers. Jeff is an active member of the National Association of College and University Attorneys (NACUA). Mr. Nolan works with clients to develop sound risk management strategies and policies, and often speaks at client-sponsored training programs and public conferences on issues related to assessment and response planning for at-risk individuals, related privacy and disability law issues, and crisis management planning. He also served as a subject matter expert and instructor for the nationwide series of campus threat assessment training workshops developed by Margolis, Healy & Associates and funded by the U.S. Department of Justice, Community Oriented Policing (COPS Office). Mr. Nolan is listed in Chambers & Partners America's Leading Lawyers for Business in the area of Labor and Employment law, in The Best Lawyers in America in the area of Labor and Employment law, and in New England Super Lawyers in the area of Employment and Labor law.

**Tara Conway**

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Ms. Tara Conway is a Threat Management Consultant with SIGMA Threat Management Associates. Ms. Conway previously worked for the U.S. Secret Service (USSS) for ten years in threat assessment and protective intelligence, where she served as a senior analyst in the Intelligence Division and National Threat Assessment Center. She was responsible for the case management of subjects considered dangerous to U.S. Secret Service protectees. Additionally, she was responsible for the research, development and preparation of threat assessments on numerous protectees, visiting Heads of State, and foreign dignitaries. Within the National Threat Assessment Center, she served as a senior researcher on the *Safe School Initiative* - the joint U.S. Secret Service and U.S. Department of Education study of school shooters – and provided extensive training on the findings of the *Safe School Initiative* and on school threat assessment. Ms. Conway also managed a national program of psychiatrists contracted by the Secret Service to consult on cases involving subjects with complex mental histories who had threatened violent action against Secret Service protectees. In this role, she served as a critical liaison between the mental health community, law enforcement agencies, and protective intelligence subjects. She is an accomplished briefer, having presented to well over 15,000 members of local, state and federal law enforcement, private sector companies, and school personnel on matters of threat assessment and other intelligence topics. She developed and presented training in support of protective intelligence investigations and provided intelligence support in the coordinating centers of

major events, to include the Democratic National Convention and the World Trade Organization. She has a diverse background in threat assessment, having worked in the areas of protective intelligence, safety in schools, preventing targeted terrorist violence, and biometrics. She has extensive experience collaborating with national and international intelligence agencies, Department of Defense elements, as well as local, state and federal law enforcement agencies to analyze threats and coordinate efforts in the areas of response and prevention. Ms. Conway has also assisted various federal agencies with full-scale project management design and coordination. Ms. Conway has a B.A. in Psychology and an M.A in Psychology (thesis pending). She is trained in threat assessment and protective intelligence.

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